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Week of
September 21, 1942

*Critics'*

# THEATRE REVIEWS

## 1942

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*†"The Morning Star" opened Monday, September 14th, at the Morosco Theatre.*
*†"New Priorities of 1943" opened Tuesday, September 15th, at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre.*
*†"Show Time" opened Wednesday, September 16th, at the Broadhurst Theatre.*


**THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS**

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.


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# "Show Time"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
*September 17, 1942*

## 'Show Time,' Vaudeville With Face Washed And Nose Clean

"Show Time," a variety show assembled by Fred F. Finklehoffe. Presented at the Broadhurst Theatre, New York, Sept. 16, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

"SHOW TIME" comes from California in the sense that its acts were assembled on the Coast by the Fred F. Finklehoffe who helped John Monks Jr. write "Brother Rat" and has been in pictures ever since. It was a spontaneous hit with last night's audience at the Broadhurst.

It is, however, essentially a Broadway show of the better class and does credit to both its promoter and its performers. Here is vaudeville that grants its audiences intelligence and an appreciation of good taste.

Curiously its leading comedians, George Jessel and Jack Haley, are so much better doing comedy routines of their own writing, or at least their own selection, than they have been the last several years doing the stuff prepared for them by others that the contrast is a little startling.

Neither of them can boast that much that is new has been added to his material. Most of it in fact is new only to those playgoers who have come recently into the theatre.

### Good Old Patter

Mr. Jessel is still telephoning Mom. Mr. Haley is again burlesquing grand opera. Mr. Jessel is still making sport of his adventures with romance. Mr. Haley continues to flirt with an occasional shady nifty and roll his sexy eyes.

But the boys wear their hair outside instead of inside their scalps, leaving their minds free to serve them as filters and not merely as receptacles for purplish gags. There is a healthy difference, as you know. Mr. Jessel is also a superior commentator, holding the stage by his wit and not by trading smut with the crowd.

The newcomer in the list of specialists is a blonde singer, Lucille Norman, who is expected to do things of moment in pictures one day. Hers is a voice with muted tones that, whenever it dominates the orchestra, is pleasant on the ears. And hers is a personality that is agreeably friendly without being brash.

Con Colleano, a master of the wire walkers' division, does as many tangos, sambas and rumbas on the wire, tossing himself into the air and landing back on the wire again, as less graceful dancers can do on the floor.

### The De Marcos, Too

Ella Logan sings vigorously and the crowd is her friend.

The reorganized or Sally Craven, De Marcos are back, and that is good. Bob Williams is there with his boneless canine. Olsen and Shirley are a superior team of contortionists turned dancers. The Berry brothers probably appeared after I left.

But it is Jessel and Haley who hold the show together and give it that quality of fun that speeds the evening and defies blackouts and threats of blackouts.

Incidentally, Mr. Jessel is reviving his Czecho refugee lecturer with a few new flourishes and maybe a new wig. That, with the Haley opera, is worth at least half the price of a ticket.

"Show Time" may prove a trifle clean for Broadway, but I trust Mr. Finklehoffe will have the courage to keep it that way. It is good fun as it is.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
*September 17, 1942*

## Variety Show Opens With Jessel and Haley

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH George Jessel and Jack Haley pretend at the Broadhurst to think that vaudeville is dead, Show Time proves them to be either alarmists or survivors of the New Priorities. The bill which Fred F. Finklehoffe, of Brother Rat fame, has brought together is very much alive. To put it crassly, it is one of the best buys now to be had at local box offices. It makes the dollar go far enough to turn the threat of inflation into a myth. Because it is a good, warm, intimate and entertaining program, friendly in its feeling, gay in its spirit, and professional in its execution.

Presiding over it in admirable fashion is George Jessel. Although Mr. Jessel commands a huge cheering section, in all honesty I must admit that hitherto I have found it hard to give the Jessel yell. I have known that he was expert and respected him for his easy domination of a stage. Even so among the countless Jessel fans I have stood like Ruth among the alien corn. I have been interested in the applause which has been so rapturously given to him, but mystified by it, as a man out of step in a procession must always be.

• • •

**Last night my allergy left me,** and I sat before Mr. Jessel as happily as a victim cured of hay fever might contemplate goldenrod. I have never seen, or hoped to see, Mr. Jessel in such fine form. Herewith I enter his cheering section cheering.

He gives the evening its tone, sets its pace, and keeps it moving with uncommon skill. His introductory patter is fresh and subdued. Even when he revives such favorites as his sentimental salute to yesteryear, his telephone conversation with Ma, or his hilarious impersonation of a Czechoslovakian slide lecturer, his old materials are presented in a new form. They have been miraculously, been developed with acumen, have gained in restraint, and hence in contagion. In fact, Mr. Jessel does a superior job.

It is his good fortune, and ours, that he has a superior vaudeville bill to introduce. It is a vaudeville bill, incidentally, which gets along happily without chorus girls from burleycue and has the advantage of presenting human beings who look like human beings. Jack Haley, for example, is one of the most likable of our funny fellows. He, and his arching eyebrows, his uprolled eyes, his pleasant smile, his hints at dance routines, his spoofed songs, and his nervous patter have been away from New York for a much too long a time for New York's good. It is delightful to have them back. And back with Mr. Jessel. Because the two of them make an excellent team.

• • •

**As if they were not enough** there is Ella Logan, "the Glasgow grenade," as she is billed. She is a personable young lady with the energy of a hurricane, much grace, and an irresistible way with a song. Last night she stopped the show. Doubtless she will continue to do so for many, many nights to come.

Then, for good measure, there are the dancing DeMarcos; and Lucille Norman, a pretty singer who sings prettily; and Bob Williams, who owns a dog as inanimate as a fur piece; and Con Colleano, an amazing gentleman who can perform more feats on a tight-rope than most people can get done on the good earth.

All in all, Show Time is a first-rate variety show. Its only trouble at present is that it is as over-generous with its encores as a bad Gilbert and Sullivan company. This slows down things considerably. And gives one time to wonder, among other irrelevances, why The Star-Spangled Banner was not played at the evening's beginning.

NEW YORK POST
*September 17, 1942*

## "Show Time," Another Variety Revue, at the Broadhurst

By WILELLA WALDORF

GEORGE JESSEL and Jack Haley decided last night at the Broadhurst Theatre that vaudeville will never come back. They were conversing idly while eating sandwiches and drinking beer, thus going Bert Wheeler one better. Mr. Wheeler does a monologue while munching a sandwich. No beer.

Let us get things straight. Mr. Wheeler is in "New Priorities of 1943" which opened at the 46th Street Theatre Tuesday night. Mr. Jessel and Mr. Haley are in "Show Time," presented at the Broadhurst last night.

"Show Time" comes, with a few changes here and there, from the West Coast where it was originally assembled. It is closer to old-time vaudeville than some of the so-called variety shows recently produced hereabout in that it is just a collection of acts strung together with occasional comment by Mr. Jessel as master of ceremonies. There are no ladies of the ensemble, and the scenery consists of a backdrop or two and a curtain here and there.

### George Jessel Up to His Old Tricks

"Show Time" manages to be informal and pleasant in its way, without ever stirring up any great excitement. Mr. Jessel, if he will forgive our saying so, is an old story in these parts and there is a good deal of him through the evening. Not only does he introduce most of the other performers, but he finds time to sing a ballad or two, drop a tear over the passing of the Good Old Days, telephone Mommer and revive that travesty on a visiting Czecho-Slovakian lecturer that was the funniest thing in last season's "High Kickers."

Mr. Jessel knows the routine so well that he manages to keep a rather sluggish show moving along, pausing now and then, of course, to indulge in sentimental reminiscence. He gave us most of the laughs we were able to muster during the evening. Jack Haley, a genial fellow with a merry gleam in his eye, was bright and gay, but seemed to be suffering from chat chronic complaint, lack of material.

Except for Mr. Jessel's occasional cracks and the gleam in Haley's eye, our happiest moments at "Show Time" were provided by the dancing DeMarcos, superior night club artists. They are always worth watching.

The singing portions of the show were handled for the most part by Ella Logan and Lucille Norman. Billed rather alarmingly as "the Glasgow grenade," Miss Logan affects a billowing tartan skirt and makes up in spirit and energy what she lacks in vocal quality. Miss Norman, a refugee from the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, has a pretty voice but is so inexperienced on the stage that it was hardly kind to put her up there in a spotlight and tell her to sing two or three popular songs just like that. Naturally she seemed a little uncertain.

### Wire Walking and a Dog Act

Con Colleano, the noted circus wire walker, opened the performance with his customary display of skill. The Berry Brothers, agile Negro dancing trio, came on late in the evening, and there was some contortion work by Olsen and Shirley, and a dog introduced by Bob Williams.

This is certainly a great era for dog acts. If any of them are among the unemployed, it's not the fault of the "bring-back-vaudeville" boys. The dog in "Show Time" is a lackadaisical red setter who just sits and looks bored to death while Mr. Williams shrieks and coos and endeavors to induce him to do tricks. But the setter continues to look bored, and finally goes all limp.

We felt pretty much like that too as "Show Time' went its blameless way.

# "Show Time"

**NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE**
*September 17, 1942*

## Variety Show

**By HOWARD BARNES**

VAUDEVILLE recaptures much of its tarnished glitter in "Show Time." This second variety show of the week has something which is rather indispensable to a sprawling succession of individual turns. It has capable and engaging performers. With George Jessel acting as what the erudite Richard Maney likes to call the conferencier, Jack Haley mugging his way comically through good and bad material, the graceful DeMarcos and the husky-voiced Ella Logan, it is a varied and frequently rewarding entertainment.

* * *

Not that the new Broadhurst offering does not sprawl. There is scarcely an act in the production which would not have been improved by stringent pruning. The specialty experts are in there doing their particular stuff up to the hilt. The catch is that they generally overdo. Even the redoubtable Haley, who has never failed to make me laugh, might have practiced a bit more restraint in his clowning. Even the great wire-walker, Con Colleano, wavers a bit too often in his remarkable feats of balance. Great two-a-day needs considerably more pace than you will find in "Show Time."

Barring that sizable qualification, it is varied, funny and reminiscent. In addition to the headliners, the production boasts exciting dancing by Olsen and Shirley and the Berry Brothers, some pleasant chanting by Lucille Norman, of the films, and the novel dog act of Bob Williams. It has jokes which date so far back that it would be impossible to determine their vintage. Moreover, there is a delightful anthology of old popular tunes. If the theatre is intent on reviving vaudeville, here is a far better formula than that employed by "Priorities of 1943."

* * *

"Show Time" has already been tested on the West Coast, where it met with considerable applause. It benefits by preliminary performances. The conferencier and Haley are not afraid to kid the producer of the concoction, Fred F. Finklehoffe. They take sideswipes at each other. They laugh at the whole idea of bringing back vaudeville. Since they do it with spirit and cunning, the oldest wisecracks take on humorous inflections. With the dancing and singing nicely spotted between their monologues and dialogues, there is only the length of single acts to make one nod.

Haley is the mainstay of the performing, to my mind, although Jessel has an effective finale to the first act. The DeMarcos are more brilliant than ever in their ballroom routines, and Ella Logan sings with her accustomed enthusiasm. There are knowing players in "Show Time." It makes a whale of a difference in a variety show.

**'SHOW TIME'**

A vaudeville program in two acts, presented at the Broadhurst Theater on September 16, 1942, by Fred F. Finklehoffe. George Jessel is master of ceremonies, and the others in the cast are Jack Haley, Ella Logan, the DeMarcos, the Berry Brothers, Bob Williams, Con Colleano, Olsen and Shirley and Lucille Norman.

**NEW YORK TIMES**
*September 17, 1942*

## 'Show Time' Arrives From the West Coast With a Variety Bill That Includes Jessel and Haley as the Comedians

**By BROOKS ATKINSON**

AFTER an hour or so of "Show Time," which was staged at the Broadhurst last evening, you begin to understand what is wrong with most vaudeville shows. Most of them do not put George Jessel, Jack Haley, Ella Logan and the De Marcos on one bill. Put them on, one at a time or occasionally together, and you are bound to have a rattling good evening of entertainment.

Fred F. Finklehoffe, who once wrote half of "Brother Rat," found that out as if by magic when he staged "Show Time" on the West Coast some time ago, and New York found it out last evening. "This is not a great show," says the ebullient Jessel, who serves as chairman, janitor, bus boy and supercargo of the program. "If, God forbid, you should miss it, you don't have to shoot yourself." But if you miss it, you might very well consider cutting your throat. For "Show Time" is a refreshing and relaxing vaudeville put on with enthusiasm by professionals.

* * *

Among other things, you have ample leisure to discover the answer to an old question: "Is it possible to have too much of Mrs. Jessel's grown-up boy?" Being on and off all through the evening and very definitely on for a solid half hour at the end of Act One, Georgie gives that question a courageous testing. He never leaves the stage except under duress. But it seemed to this observer that Mr. Jessel grew funnier the longer he was on stage; even his ancient telephone conversation with momma was fresh and gusty. When he talked about his private affairs he was unobjectionable, and when he attended strictly to the business of telling jokes and tossing in wry comments with a grimace he was infectiously amusing.

For he is the master entertainer. If ever there was a man born for the stage it is Mrs. Jessel's comic and sentimental boy Georgie, who can make an audience sit back, expand and enjoy itself. Add skill and experience to magnetism and enthusiasm, and you have in Georgie Jessel a great theatre performer.

* * *

In versatility he may not have his match in Jack Haley. But he has a comedian who is the perfect contrast in style and personality; and, since "Show Time" has both of them, it is worth paying particular attention to. None of Mr. Haley's latter-day musical shows has presented him to such advantage. Book shows have to be just right to fit his personality. In the current bill of turns he is in top form, and gives a boyishly spontaneous performance, singing an operatic version of "Chattanooga Choo-choo" that is unlike anything else in the world of music, and reading a pithy letter from the draft board that is vastly comic. Mr. Haley and Mr. Jessel work extremely well together, not without a touch of footlights malice. Although Mr. Haley has put his material together out of odds and ends, he has taken them out of his top drawer and made them seem like gems of humor.

There is more to "Show Time." Ella Logan is singing songs the hard way, much to the audience's pleasure. The De Marcos are skimming and grinning through polite drawing-room measures. Con Colleano, who looks as if he would stab you in the back for a peso, is performing some impossible feats of balance on a wire. Olsen and Shirley are happily dancing, Bob Williams is wooing a lazy chow mongrel who performs no feats whatsoever, and Lucille Norman is treating some songs to her white teeth and golden blond hair. After this reporter reluctantly departed on printing-press business, the Berry Brothers were scheduled to contribute another turn of dancing.

For all this reporter knows, Georgie Jessel may still be on the stage, telling jokes and making flip conversation. If he is you can bet that the audience hasn't gone home yet.

**NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN**
*September 17, 1942*

## George Jessel's Monologue As Czech Traveler a Wonderful Bit of Insanity

**By JOHN ANDERSON**

NOT since the celebrated occasion when Ed Wynn made smoke come out of his ears at the Winter Garden has your old sourpuss been reduced to such dishevelled laughter, as he was at the Broadhurst last night by George Jessel, so help me, in a new variety show called "Show Time" presented by Fred F. Finklehoffe. Though I begged Mr. Jessel quietly between gasps to stop because he was killing me, Mr. Jessel proceeded, possibly with that intent, in what now seems to me one of the funniest monologues in the world. I refer to the lecture of that eminent though frowsy Czechoslovakian traveller, Prof. Labbamacher, whose costume, remarks, and platform manner make up as wonderful a piece of insanity as you will find this side of Mattewan. It is a superb travesty and plain nuts.

This effect on your correspondent is stranger still when you consider that Mr. Jessel has never seemed very richly comic not even when he did this sketch before in "High Kickers." It is my theory that Mr. Jessel simply reached a new level last night with improved material—not that I am going noisily to pieces.

While Prof. Labbamacher is certainly the funniest spot in the show it is happily surrounded by excellent material, of wide variety and smart effect. It is an informal program of nine numbers, and while the insistent encores gave its first performance a tendency to drag, it is clever and shrewdly put together for a maximum of entertainment with a minimum of fuss—and no feathers at all thank God.

### Quite a Set Up

Mr. Finklehoffe has simply got together a group which seemed not only small at first but rather skimpy. The playbill lists the names in two short paragraphs but they are the names of Jack Haley, Ella Logan, the DeMarcos, the Berry Brothers, Bob Williams, Con Colleano, Olsen and Shirley, and Lucille Norman. And, of course, Mr. Jessel, who is the conferencier. It is quite a set up.

There is not much hankey-pankey about reviving vaudeville, no pretty album work about the old Palace. Mr. Jessel, in fact, sneers at the whole thing, razzes the other members of the cast and indulges for a moment in the vagrant memories of the fine old days when Fanny was the name of his aunt and a goose was "a small animal, not a career for Lou Holtz."

Hollywood probably exacted a trainload of playwrights in the swap for Jack Haley but whatever the terms it is great to have him back again. He is certainly one of our most genial comics and he lends aid and comfort to the proceedings, especially when he is kidding with Mr. Jessel and singing with Ella Logan.

### Stopping the Show

Though it was well onto a delayed closing time Miss Logan stopped the show with her singing and brought such obstreperous applause that she had to do "Shady Side of the Street" and finally "Tipperary" which she does as I have never heard it done before.

The other numbers are all out of the same top drawer. The Berry Brothers dance with their usual frantic wizardry, the DeMarcos with their glossy and graceful precision and a pair of youngsters, Olsen and Shirley, do some limber and unorthodox stepping. Bob Williams has his amusing dog act, Con Colleano performs his remarkable forward somersault on a slack wire, and Lucille Norman, a pretty Hollywood songbird, does some pleasant enough thrush-work.

Even where the material is familiar the show has an air of spontaneous good humor and high spirits.

It needs sharper timing and drastic control of the encores. Also Mr. Jessel rambles too much, especially in his first act appearances, but I forgive him everything for the Professor. I am still laughing.

# "Show Time"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
*September 17, 1942*

## *Vaudeville Is Up And About Again*

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

VAUDEVILLE got more or less back in step last night, after being pushed clean off the sidewalk on Tuesday. Perhaps *Show Time* would seem less pleasant had *Priorities of 1943* been less dreary; but it has personality and showmanship, it performs practically in your lap, and the miscellaneous efforts of Georgie Jessel manage to hold a lot of pretty loose parts together. The show certainly sprawls, but it somehow doesn't sag. It's untidy, but never too dull; uneven, but doesn't fall flat. "If God forbid you should happen to miss this show, you needn't shoot yourself either," Jessel remarks in one of his hundred or so trips before the curtain. In which he is certainly right; but things being what they are, and Jessel himself being all he is, you needn't go out of your way to miss it.

It's overwhelmingly Jessel's evening, what with his serving indefatiguably as Master of Ceremonies; phoning his mother and getting in a word with everybody in the family; impersonating a refugee professor; munching sandwiches and chewing the fat with Jack Haley; and inventing or falling heir to half a dozen other chores. It's quite possible that he's around too much, but you do wait for him when he's not around. It's also quite possible that he talks too much, and at times too freely, but he's a showman from the soles of his feet to the lift of his eyebrows, and a quipster whose best remarks, whether mad or malicious, bring down the house. When he throws a lighted firecracker at a rival comic, it certainly lands. He may sell his family down the river, but he's uproarious on the auction block.

• • •

As for the rest of the show, the DeMarcos are the smoothest and lightest ballroom dancers in the business, and a pleasure to watch. Jack Haley doesn't do very much, or do it awfully well, but he has a pleasant personality. Con Colleano opens the show with some brilliant tight-rope walking, and Olsen & Shirley are an agile pair of acrobatic dancers, though the male half of the combination is disturbingly roguish. Ella Logan drew a tremendous hand for her sentimental ballards and Scottish capers, but her charm continues to elude me.

All in all, it's a pleasant evening, if far from a brilliant show.

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NEW YORK SUN
*September 17, 1942*

## *'Show Time,' More Vaudeville, Opens at the Broadhurst Theater*

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

VAUDEVILLE is evidently not dead. It is ubiquitous. It recurred last evening at the Broadhurst Theater with George Jessel as master of ceremonies and Jack Haley as associate comedian in a production called "Show Time." "Show Time" has only one trained dog, and he is trained to be limp; it has no chorus girls whatever and it is pleasantly free from the tawdriness which in the new vaudeville has sometimes disturbed the sensitive. It is reasonably amusing.

As vaudeville probably should, it puts its greatest trust in the tried and the true. The amazing antics of the man on the tight wire are amazing in a familiar fashion; you will have seen before now, and admired before now, the casual grace with which the dancing DeMarcos perform the almost impossible. And unless you have led a sheltered life you will have encountered elsewhere most of the quips with which Mr. Jessel enlivens his role as what the management prefers to call the "conferencier." Mr. Jessel is hilarious, also, in his telephonic conversation with mamma, a comic sequence which Mr. Jessel seems to have been keeping from play reviewers. Every one else, I am severely informed, has been familiar with this routine for years and loved it dearly, as they should.

Mr. Haley has seemed to me somewhat more comical in the past, although when he joins forces with Ella Logan in "Show Time" the two of them go places. Miss Logan also goes places by herself, with her vehement charm and vigorous singing and the odd kind of quaintness she manages to maintain, while almost shaking herself apart. But Mr. Haley, who bobs up almost as frequently as Mr. Jessel, is always an amiable comedian and agreeable to have around.

It is hard to say anything about the show as a whole because the show isn't at any time a whole. It is a collection of varying odds and ends, related to one another only through Mr. Jessel. In other words, I suppose, it is vaudeville, of such sainted memory. If you would rather see and hear Mr. Jessel and Mr. Haley and Miss Logan deal with new material, if you are not really greatly excited by tight wire performers and artfully limp dogs, you may find "Show Time" something you can take or leave alone. Or, as Mr. Jessel himself remarks at the very beginning, "if you should happen to miss it, you don't shoot yourself, either." I am not sure you even rap your knuckles.

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# "New Priorities of 1943"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
*September 16, 1942*

## *1943 Version Follows Fischer Pattern in Successful Vaudeville Revivals*

By JOHN ANDERSON

JUDGED by its title, the "New Priorities of 1943" at the 46th St. Theatre last night seemed optimistically ahead of its times, but, judged by its material, it is as old as its jokes.

Though it follows the pattern of Mr. Fischer's successful revivals of vaudeville, it is not nearly as good as "Priorities" or even "Top Notchers." It has its hilarious passages when Bert Wheeler is on stage, especially in his informal and idiotic gossip at the end, and it has again that wonderful dog-act, "The Bricklayers," without which, it seems, vaudeville is impossible.

Let us proclaim that vaudeville is not dead; it merely sleepeth. I almost dozed off a little myself.

The material is not as poor as it seems, but the production lacks Mr. Fischer's previous showmanship. Henny Youngman, for instance, can work his own act into completely screwball humor, but he is not very good as a master of ceremonies. He misses the old master touch of Lou Holtz and the topical smartness and drive of Walter O'Keefe. He has an excellent and amusing quality of his own, but it is not shown to advantage in the running patter of M. C. routine.

### Full of Glamor

Carol Bruce is a shiny chanteuse, full of glamor and similar equipment, but she needs some showmanship trimmings and something of a buildup.

The veteran and ever-likable Harry Richman deserves something fresher than an album of his old songs, if we are expected to jump the New Year by more than three months.

These, along with an excellent acrobatic team called "The Acromaniacs" and a pair of dancers called Harrison and Fisher, are the mainstays of the show.

It is the inimitable Mr. Wheeler who pulls the evening out of its quietly uninteresting routine by his two appearances, one in a daffy wrangle with Hank Ladd, and the other in this crazily, malicious gossip about the people in the show, whispered into the microphone, while Mr. Wheeler chews a sandwich.

It is then that he tops even the backstage backbiting staged in one of the other vaudeville shows by Lou Holtz, Phil Baker and Willie Howard—that ferocious and devious chat, you may remember, when they assassinated practically every other show in town.

Among Mr. Wheeler's more cockeyed contentions is that Mr. Fischer is a fine gentleman, if you don't do any business with him, and that he is actually a very kindly man who helped a Boston boy, hurt in a street accident, with a blood transfusion. Over the crumbs of his sandwich and his own crust he adds regretfully that the boy promptly froze to death.

### Doubly Embarrassed

As one who blushed slightly in trying to report politely the peculiar anatomical achievement of Carrie Finnell in "Star and Garter," I am doubly embarrassed at the problem of reporting on the doubly peculiar abilities of a tasseled young woman in a number about the WAACs. Where Miss Finnell manages her outrigging with certain rhythmic, if hideous, muscular control, this latest accomplishment, easily four times as vulgar, is not only fore but aft, with something of the aesthetic effect of a Catherine wheel tied to a loose cow. It's the limit.

Mr. Richman presided at a pay-as-you-go strip-tease, tied, patriotically, as he pointed out, very carefully, to the sale of war bonds and stamps. At so much a ribbon, the gentlemen in the audience bought the scanty coverage off a handsomely assembled young woman of high visibility. With what I suppose you could call the peep-show *piece de resistance*, the bidding went very high.

Jules Brulatour bid $10,000 in war bonds, and Louis Marx topped even that patriotic fervor by bidding $25,000.

General Sherman, who also knew what war was, apparently hadn't seen anything.

# "New Priorities of 1943"

NEW YORK SUN
*September 16, 1942*

## 'New Priorities of 1943,' Opens at the Forty-sixth Street Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

GIVEN time, every one you ever heard of is going to appear in one of Clifford C. Fischer's vaudeville revues. Mr. Fischer offered a new bill last evening at the Forty-sixth Street Theater under the title "New Priorities of 1943," and he has this time enlisted Harry Richman and Bert Wheeler to support the trained dogs which have, by now, become almost a trade-mark of the new vaudeville. A good many other people, including girls in odd costumes, also participate.

Probably the most accurate report will inform you that there is something in the new edition of "Priorities" to suit every taste. Those who like the doggy "Bricklayers" will be pleased to see that those remarkable animals have lost none of their skill. Those who, on the other hand, like acrobats can have acrobats. There is even, this time, a touch of allure, with show girls parading in substitute costumes made of brushes and bath sponges and with other girls hopping about in innocently absurd imitation of WAACS. There is also a reasonably elaborate dance number, Harrison and Fisher participating, and it, too, is innocently absurd.

Mr. Wheeler and a sidekick named Hank Ladd, who bears a somewhat haunting resemblance to Thomas E. Dewey, provide most of the comedy. Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Ladd are funny together, and Mr. Wheeler, toward the end, is funny all by himself as he whispers the low-down on Mr. Fischer and Mr. Richman. Neither, it appears, is really a geranium. Mr. Fischer gave blood in a transfusion recently and the patient froze to death.

Mr. Richman is about at his old form. Carol Bruce sings pleasantly and there is a remarkably young woman who can twirl tassels affixed to the most unexpected places. There is a patriotic strip tease, with corsages of stamps to be sold, and last evening for one crucial corsage there was brisk bidding. It finally went to Louis Marx, a toy man, who engaged himself to buy $25,000 worth of bonds, so that patriotism and pleasure were combined.

And on the whole it is a pleasant, not pretentious, show. It begins slowly; Henny Youngman, although in his own right comical, is no great shakes as a master of ceremonies. Perhaps last year's edition was rather funnier. But this one is generous entertainment.

### 'NEW PRIORITIES OF 1943'

A vaudeville revue, staged by Jean Le Seyeux; dances staged by Truly McGee; ensemble music and lyrics by Lester Lee and Jerry Seelen; presented at the Forty-sixth Street Theater on September 15, 1942, by Clifford C. Fischer, by arrangement with the Messrs. Shubert. In the cast are Harry Richman, Bert Wheeler, Carol Bruce, Hank Ladd, Henny Youngman, Johnny Burke, Sally Keith, Harrison and Fisher, the Bricklayers and others.

NEW YORK POST
*September 16, 1942*

## "New Priorities of 1943" At the 46th Street Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

"PRIORITIES OF 1943," which started the "back to vaudeville" movement on Broadway last season, has gone on tour, but its producers have lost no time in bringing in a successor optimistically entitled "New Priorities of 1943," revealed last night at the 46th Street Theatre.

The first "Priorities," it will be recalled, was stuffed to bursting with comedians. The new "Priorities" has its amusing moments, when Bert Wheeler or Henny Youngman happens to wander in, but it goes in for more moaning into a microphone, and it is more elaborate and show-girly than its predecessor was. It is also intensely patriotic.

Along about 10:30 Harry Richman introduced a number in which a pretty young woman of the ensemble appeared dressed in bouquets of war stamps, which Mr. Richman proceeded to sell to the audience. As the bouquets were purchased, the young woman became nuder and nuder until there was but one bouquet left—a large one worth $10.

Mr. Richman then proceeded to auction it off. There was bidding while the stars of the show whooped it up in the aisles and balconies, and for a while it was a spirited contest between Mr. Louis Marx and Mr. Jules Brulatour. Mr. Marx finally won the bouquet by purchasing $25,000 worth of War Bonds. The young woman, bereft of her bouquets, retired to the wings in a state of patriotic confusion.

Another wartime note was struck when the chorus of "Priorettes" went through a drill in satin and spangled uniforms as a tribute to the WAACS, and Sally Keith, showing far more epidermis than is customary in military circles, shook, shivered and waved orange-colored plumes, exhibiting amazing muscular control in the most unexpected places.

"New Priorities of 1943" did not get around to the WAVES last night but their turn is surely coming.

### Mr. Wheeler Has Changed His Diet

Bert Wheeler is a pretty funny fellow when he gets into his act with Hank Ladd, and later more or less on his own. It was so long since we had seen Mr. Wheeler that we had all but forgotten his style. Several persons informed us before the show opened that he always eats an apple.

Mr. Wheeler has changed his diet. He does not eat an apple in "New Priorities of 1943." He eats a sandwich.

Henny Youngman, the master of ceremonies, was droll in a mad, fantastic fashion now and then, and Johnny Burke, dressed as a private in World War I, did his dead-pan monologue about going to France with the AEF.

Mr. Richman, faultlessly tuxedoed, meltingly toyed with lyrics of yesteryear while sentimental members of the audience gurgled and sobbed in ecstacy, and Miss Carol Bruce, introduced as Hollywood's newest singing star," confided some Gershwin and a dash of Irving Berlin to the microphone.

Hollywood does some weird things to its imports from Broadway. When they come back it is hard to recognize them. Miss Bruce, when she was "discovered" in "Louisiana Purchase" a few seasons ago, was dark and sultry. She is now blonde and quite indistinguishable from two or three hundred other blondes who have been run through the Hollywood glamourizing machine.

"New Priorities of 1943" is an intermittently amusing variety show, with more emphasis on girls than usual, and a strong vein of patriotic sentiment. In case there are still those who insist that no vaudeville bill is complete without a dog act, the talented Bricklayers are on hand again. "By unanimous request," the program says fondly.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
*September 16, 1942*

## "New Priorities" Raises $25,000 in One Successful Bond Tease

★ ★ ★—

"New Priorities of 1943," assembled by Clifford C. Fischer with the encouragement of the Messrs. Shubert. Songs by Lester Lee and Jerry Seelen. Presented at the 46th St. Theater, New York, Sept. 15, 1942.

By BURNS MANTLE

AT THE 46th St. Theatre last night, where "The New Priorities of 1943" was being shown for the first time, Harry Richman started a bond-buying spree when he offered to induce beautiful Dorothy Partington to sell the corsage of War Stamps which she was holding discreetly, not to say strategically, in front of her practically naked person to the highest bidder.

Tommy Manville quietly started the bidding by offering to buy the corsage for $100 plus the $10 in stamps it contained. Jules Brulatour with a modest blush mantling his noble dome, raised the price to $1,000 and then to $2,000.

At this point, a soft-voiced but determined gentleman whom Mr. Richman identified as Louis Marx, the well-known toy manufacturer who is now making something in the destructive line for the Government's war effort, bid $2,500, then $3,000 and finally, just to make it a good bid, $25,000.

### Pleased Patriots

It was, as Mr. Richman said, quite exciting and tremendously satisfying to all patriots, including Miss Partington, the stripteuse. She might have waved her hands in glee, but she couldn't, under the circumstances, let go the corsage.

When Mr. Richman finally took it from her, Miss Dorothy was revealed wearing a small adhesive plaster on which was painted the simple legend: "Buy Bonds!"

Otherwise "The New Priorities" uncovered another lively vaudeville show that makes up in quantity what it may lack in class.

There are no less than fifteen acts, all of established standing and several of superior entertainment value. My own favorites happen to be Bert Wheeler, about whom there is nothing old but his wrinkles and an indestructible patter; Harrison and Fisher, the whirling adagio dancers, who have worked out an "Amphitryon" number that is both skillful and clever; the "Acromaniacs," who do their generally amazing acrobatics to a jive tune, and "The Bricklayers," probably the greatest of all trained dog numbers.

### Audience Favorites

Favorites with last night's audience included Harry Richman, who sings as gustily as ever, and as far from key; Carol Bruce, whose sultry soprano is a popular organ, especially when she sings of love of something in "New Orleans," and Sally Keith, a lady of trained muscles who makes the shimmy girls of another day seem a group of tame and placid jiggiers.

Mr. Clifford's effort with this, his third or fourth assembling of vaudeville material still available, is to offer a bargain amount of entertainment at popular prices, and I would say he has fulfilled his contract.

He includes, in addition to those mentioned, Henny Youngman, a monologist with many followers; Johnny Burke, a veteran of the wars with many service jokes; Hank Ladd, a helpful straight man for Mr. Wheeler; Ted Adair, a superior dancer, and the Radio Aces, who were going strong vocally as I was obliged to hurry to work.

There is an active and personable line of girls to sing physical songs by Lester Lee and Jerry Seelen and show off snappy costumes by Mahieu.

Encores were plentiful last night, but it was Mr. Marx and his $25,000 bond purchase that stole the show.

# "New Priorities of 1943"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
*September 16, 1942*

## Vaudeville Takes A Terrific Spill

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

MR. FISCHER, who has turned the clock several months forward with his title, has turned it many years backward with his show. Vaudeville last night was the merest ghost of vaudeville last season. It fumbled and floundered for very long stretches, and only caught its stride for very short ones. There was a want of bounce and a lack of showmanship—chiefly, no doubt, because there was a lack of showmen. There was no Lou Holtz to pull the show together or wave the actors on; no Willie Howard to give it belly-laughs, or Paul Draper to give it style. The best it had to offer was only second best, while much of it was hard to take, and some of it impossible to explain.

The best of the headliners is Bert Wheeler, whose act is fairly funny, though not quite funny enough. It portrays him as a frustrated comic whose stooge, Hank Ladd, keeps beating him to the draw. Carol Bruce is pleasantly husky at the mike, but has lost some of the freshness and vividness she had when she first hit Broadway. On the plus side, too, are the Acromaniacs, three fast find multiple-jointed fellows who make human pretzels of themselves; and The Bricklayers, who are no longer news, but are still a fine dog act, even though they weren't clicking perfectly last night.

* * *

The rest of the evening can be dusted off quickly. Harry Richman is back with some of his old swagger, but very little else, scurrying through the choruses of the songs he used to sing and conducting a War-Stamp selling strip tease. As Master of Ceremonies, Henny Youngman squires the show about with no particular skill, and fires off a lot of gags, only a few of which hit the mark. Johnny Burke fires off more gags with even fewer hits. In addition, there is a rather unaccountable display of dancing by Harrison and Fisher, and a downright enigmatic first act finale, the patriotic intentions of which are obliterated by the bodily contortions of a young lady who must have seen Carrie Finnell in *Star and Garter*, and swore then and there to outdo her.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
*September 16, 1942*

## Two-a-Day Travesty

By HOWARD BARNES

THE bring-back-vaudeville movement received a stiff setback at the Forty-sixth Street Theater last night. "Priorities of 1943" is both a sorry show and a travesty of a once great tradition. At best it rings a tiny tinkle for those of us who remember the gala shows at the Palace a decade or two ago. At worst, it will confirm a new generation of theatergoers in the belief that variety amply earned its eclipse. Two-a-day will have to do much better than this if it is to struggle back into recognition in the contemporary amusement scene.

* * *

Like its predecessors of last season, "Priorities of 1942" and "Keep 'Em Laughing," the new theatrical exhibit is not really a vaudeville show at all. The most pretentious aspects of the revue form have been borrowed to give a series of acts the semblance of a leg show. The intimate come-ons of night club capers have been added to make customers believe they are witnessing something off the beaten track of Broadway theatricals. Unlike its predecessors, it hasn't even got the comic gusto and the snappy staging which have characterized some of our better cabaret entertainments.

* * *

The only genuine touch of oldtime variety excitement in "Priorities of 1943" is the engaging presence of Bert Wheeler. Starting haltingly, the veteran comedian warms to his job throughout the proceedings, contributing the few bright moments of a desultory offering. His mixups with Hank Ladd and Francetta Malloy are occasionally hilarious and the old sandwich gag is resurrected to demonstrate that the essential elements of slapstick comedy remain unchanging. If you are a Wheeler fan, as this reviewer is, the new try at two-a-day capers may prove moderately satisfactory.

* * *

Without Wheeler the show is lean on talent and fun. To be sure, there is the great dog act known as The Bricklayers, which might have been seen in "Keep 'Em Laughing." There is Henny Youngman, who almost succeeds in putting over a glib line of patter. The Acromaniacs are fairly impressive in a tumbling, strong man sketch, and Harrison and Fisher dance effectively. But when it comes to Harry Richman's singing you can have both his gestures and his voice, while Carol Bruce adds little to her professional luster with some torch numbers. The fact is that "Priorities of 1943" is bad vaudeville for the most part, whether it is new or nostalgic.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
*September 16, 1942*

## Bert Wheeler Heads the New Priorities of 1943

By JOHN MASON BROWN

LIKE most sequels the New Priorities of 1943 is not nearly so good as was its predecessor. In fact, with the hilarious exception of Bert Wheeler and one intermittently amusing number by Henny Youngman, it more closely resembles vaudeville's post mortem than its revival.

The first Priorities, you will remember, boasted Lou Holtz, Willie Howard, Phil Baker and Paul Draper among its headliners. It was an extremely good show—lively, varied and convulsing. But where it was assembled from a full larder, the cupboard seems to have been bare when Mr. Fischer went to fetch his present edition. That is, save for the joyous exceptions already noted.

Mr. Wheeler is a very funny fellow. He knows how to take the rap and give it. He has a quick wit and a conquering personality. He can make the audience eat corn out of his hands and love it. A top hat is the crown he wears to show that he belongs to the royal line of comics. Out of it he can make jokes jump like rabbits. In Hank Ladd, who looks for all the world as if he might be Thomas E. Dewey's big brother, he has found the perfect heckler. Mr. Wheeler's game is to pretend he is a star turned into a stooge. As he plays it with Mr. Ladd the game proves to be a grand vaudeville act.

* * *

**One grand vaudeville headliner,** however, can no more make a vaudeville show than one swallow makes a summer or a dinner. The new Priorities must count Lou Holtz among its losses. It needs a master of ceremonies just as much as it needs numbers for him to introduce.

Henny Youngman tries to slip into the Holtz shoes, but he cannot fill them, although Mr. Wheeler could. Mr. Youngman is droll, very droll, when he is doing a mad turn of his own. It is as a master of ceremonies that he leaves much, if not most, to be desired.

Mr. Youngman has his popular favorites to introduce. There is Harry Richman, for example (if you like Harry Richman), with his jaunty smile as deep-set as the lines on a scarab, modestly heading a cavalcade of his song hits down Memory Lane. And there is Carol Bruce, singing the St. Louis Blues and a few Gershwin numbers, but badly displayed and poorly used. Yes, and as a weak substitute for Paul Draper, Harrison and Fisher dance an Amphitryon 39 number which by no means takes the place of Amphitryon 38.

* *

**One lady out of burlesque** demonstrates she is quite a tassel-tosser in a yawnful first act finale about the WAACS. And those amazing dogs, The Bricklayers, now appear almost as bored with their same old routine as some of us are.

All in all, the new Priorities compels one to look back affectionately on the old. Mr. Wheeler, however, wins his stanch admirers even in such a setting.

NEW YORK TIMES
*September 16, 1942*

## THE PLAY IN REVIEW

### "New Priorities"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN THE first place, this column wishes to express a certain modest appreciation for the good humor of Bert Wheeler and Henny Youngman. As the chief comics of "New Priorities of 1943," which occurred at the Forty-sixth Street Theatre last evening, they bring something more than personality to a vaudeville show. Playing the thwarted little man who tries to tell some of the gag-lines in his own act, Mr. Wheeler is pleasant company in the first half of the evening. In the second half he is particularly amusing in a confidential chat over the footlights about some of the other people in the show. It is good to know that Bert has a fat contract for the "New Priorities." He gets ten per cent of everything over $32,000. "You can see about what I am going to make out of it," he says hurriedly between bites on the sandwich he is munching.

* * *

Henny Youngman is the Broadway version of "A Slow Train Through Arkansas"—a joke-book that can be purchased in old-fashioned railroad newsstands. The jokes run on at about thirty-five miles an hour, one leading directly into the next with a minimum of switching onto branch lines. Except for the suggestion of a droll grin, Mr. Youngman is the dead-pan comic who hardly moves from the microphone. His style is one of profusion; if he doesn't slay you with the first, second or third joke, he will probably lay you out with the fourth or fifth.

In the second act, Mr. Youngman starts to inhabit the theatre. He moves, which is an excellent thing to do on the stage. He plays the violin between gags. Putting on an irrelevant cap with ear-muffs, he devotes about five minutes to a fantasy of jokes, song cues and nonsense, and contributes something real to an evening's enjoyment. Mr. Youngman has been standing profitably in front of a microphone for so many years that he is probably settled in his rigid routine. But it is fair to observe that he is only about half as funny as he could be if he were a full-fledged theatre performer.

* * *

That just about completes the story of the "New Priorities." Excepting the bricklaying-dog act, held over from the first edition, the new show is flat and dull. Debonair Harry Richman, with double-barreled voice and rich suitings, is in poor form. And so is Carol Bruce, the brassy minstrel who sang "Louisiana Purchase" a few seasons ago better than she is singing anything in this show.

Some of the taste in the "New Priorities" is merely humorless, as in the martial chorus number in honor of the Waacs. What, no spears or knee-high white kid marching boots? But the taste represented by the auctioning off of odds and ends of a chorus girl's costume for the purchase of War Bonds may be conservatively described as appalling. After a spirited session of bidding between Jules Brulatour and Louis Marx, the former toy manufacturer, Mr. Marx stripped the ultimate bit of finery off the model for $25,000 to help win the war. Call it patriotism on its knees.

# "The Morning Star"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
*September 15, 1942*

## "The Morning Star" Is a Tense Drama of 1940 Wartime London

"The Morning Star," drama by Emlyn Williams. Produced by Guthrie McClintic at the Morosco Theatre, New York, Sept. 14, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THEY fall into a pattern, these dramas of the bombed and the brave in London town. It must be a correct pattern of a city and its people under fire, or it would not recur so frequently or so persistently.

First there was "The Wookey." Then there was "The Heart of a City." And now there is "The Morning Star," which, I think, is the best of the three, at the Morosco.

Emlyn Williams wrote it, a little hurriedly and a little confusedly, I have no doubt. As who wouldn't, writing and working through one blitz after another?

This is a story of dramatic incidents pieced together out of the hell that was London through the month of August, and more particularly the months of September and October, in 1940.

That, you will remember, was the time that experts we want to believe have agreed Hitler lost the war. It was the time the pompous Goering was sending wave after wave of bombers over the city by the Thames and tearing it building from building, and one huddle of helpless citizens from another.

### British as Usual

It was the time, too, that these citizens were picking themselves up out of rubble—those who could move—and going about their business as usual, thumbing their smudgy noses at the Goering sky.

"And there was my wall paper for strangers to stare at! I didn't like that," says the charwoman, Mrs. Lane, in the play when she comes to report the crash of her home.

It was in August of 1940 that young Cliff Parrilow suffered a war shock that temporarily knocked him out. He was about to get his degree in medical college; about to prove something fine as a discovery in medicine; when they grabbed him for some sort of menial defense work.

Cliff took it the wrong way; practically left his wife; took up with a frivolous blonde (gentlemen seem always to prefer blondes in crises), and acted pretty much the fool.

Then came the blitz. The Parrilow family huddled together in one room and made the best of things. Took in an old gentleman deep in the querulous years and his companion (a Welshman named Rhys Williams, as usual, though they program him as Watkyn).

### Character Wins

They take their bombings in their several strides, these English. During the worst of them Young Cliff finds himself, and his mother recovers enough of her philosophy of death and the hereafter to help her carry on, even though she has lost her youngest and best beloved son.

It is a drama tossed together rather than one carefully and thoughtfully builded. You have to take quite a bit for granted. It isn't easy to accept Cliff's turning from his wife to the flighty trollope under the circumstances. You know that Mrs. Lane keeps her hat in an abandoned refrigerator for laughs. Scenes and lines stem from the author's vivid sense of what is effective theatre and little else.

But it adds up to moving entertainment and it gives us a wholesome taste, a sort of realistic rehearsal, of what we may yet have to expect and endure. Therefore it is a play that should, I think, be seen by many people.

The company is an excellent one. Glady's Cooper, slim and lovely, heads it, playing the widow Parrilow with fortitude plus, and gay humor as well. Also with an understanding of British heroines, on and off the stage, that makes her a finer actress today than she was in the days of her greatest popularity.

There is young Gregory Peck, looking enough like Philip Merivale to be a younger brother and playing with something of the Merivale steadiness and poise and eloquent force when needed.

Cecil Humphreys is true to type as the querulous one, and Rhys Williams makes the most of his effective scenes and his Welsh accent.

Brenda Forbes scores another Brenda Forbes character hit, and Wendy Barrie is exasperatingly like an exasperating stage trollop. Jill Esmond and Nicholas Joy are there also, and helpful.

A nice setting by Stewart Chaney and sensible direction by Mr. McClintic.

### 'THE MORNING STAR'

A play in three acts by Emlyn Williams; staged by Guthrie McClintic; settings by Stewart Chaney; presented by Mr. McClintic at the Morosco Theater on September 14, 1942. The cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| Mrs. Lane | Brenda Forbes |
| Mrs. Parrilow | Gladys Cooper |
| Alison Parrilow | Jill Esmond |
| Dr. Datcher (S. D.) | Cecil Humphreys |
| Brimbo Watkyn | Rhys Williams |
| Cliff Parrilow | Gregory Peck |
| Wanda Baring | Wendy Barrie |
| Sir Leo Alvers | Nicholas Joy |

NEW YORK POST
*September 15, 1942*

## "The Morning Star" a New Drama of London's Blitz

By WILELLA WALDORF

EMLYN WILLIAMS, one of Britain's leading actor-playwrights, takes his turn at dramatizing the London blitzkrieg in "The Morning Star," presented by Guthrie McClintic at the Morosco Theatre last night. The play was produced in London ten months ago and is still running there with Mr. Williams himself in the role of the young doctor who is its pivotal character.

In some respects Mr. Williams' drama of the blitz is a moving experience in the theatre. His thesis is a respectable one. His background is convincing. It is unfortunate that in developing his sprawling plot, he becomes at times unforgivably, and often quite unnecessarily, clumsy.

The framework of the story he has to tell is always very evident, although it is decorated with a good deal of corroborative detail. The detail is sometimes entertaining.

### The Parrilows in Wartime

The Parrilow household—everything usable moved into the drawing-room for the duration—undergoes the blitz with a matter-of-fact British brand of courage and humor that is heartening to watch and often very amusing to listen to.

Mr. Williams is at his best when he pictures Mrs. Parrilow, a widow who works in the censorship office, occupying a strategically placed mattress on her drawing-room floor while the bombs fall outside.

Gazing up dreamily from her lowly couch she remarks: "I've never been under a piano before. Extraordinary!"

Mrs. Lane, the charwoman who carefully puts her hat in the icebox each morning as if it were the customary cupboard, is a bright spot in Mr. Williams' gallery of London portraits. He is an expert at charwomen and Mrs. Lane is one of his happiest creations.

### The Doctor's Discovery

But the author is not merely interested in showing us the reactions of an upper middle class London household during that reign of terror in 1940. His leading character is a young doctor of more than usual brilliance, whose researches have been cut short by the war. Flung by the emergency back into routine hospital work, he goes all moody and cynical, writes an "ersatz" novel that becomes a best seller, has an affair with a pretty blonde nit-wit who lives in one room at the Dorchester while his wife is away doing war work, and is on the point of going to Hollywood to cash in on his newly discovered literary facility, when his young brother is killed in a plane defending Surrey.

Presto, Cliff's better self snaps up again. Spurred on by his aged medical instructor, who happens to be a paying guest in the house, the young man goes back to his research work—discovering a new treatment for shock. But when the time comes to perform the first operation using the new treatment, blind and reactionary bureaucracy interferes. Then, with bombs falling all around, a case is flung upon his own doorstep. . . .

There is nothing wrong with this plot except that in unfolding it the author keeps straining the audience's credulity to the breaking point and tossing in trumped-up theatrical effects that keep reminding one that "The Morning Star" is, after all, just a show. He is uncommonly long about getting to the point, too, and the sad result is that despite some very effective character drawing, a number of well-written stretches of dialogue, and a fine cast, this play is a disappointment, like the other blitz plays that have gone before it.

### A First-class Acting Company

s Guthrie McClintic, who directed with a careful eye for detail, has done all he could to supply a proper cast, and Stewart Chaney's setting is pleasant.

We have seen only a few of Gladys Cooper's performances abroad, but her Mrs. Parrilow must be one of the best of a long career. It is by far the most impressive work she has done in this country.

Brenda Forbes, who only a few months back was charladying in another Emlyn Williams play, "Yesterday's Magic," outdoes herself as Mrs. Lane. Cecil Humphreys is delightful as the retired old campaigner who comes up to London from the country because he wants to be in the front lines. Rhys Williams makes a good deal of his faithful Welsh retainer.

Gregory Peck, a young man who has done very little in the theatre before this, gives an impressive account of himself as the unhappy young doctor—the role played abroad by the author. Jill Esmond, absent from Broadway for some years, strikes the right note as the deserted wife, and Nicholas Joy trips through once or twice in a typical Nicholas Joy role.

Wendy Barrie, making her Broadway debut as the nit-wit blonde with whom the young doctor is smitten, plays the part very effectively, but Mr. Williams' play-writing calls for her to come undulating into the Parrilow household at all sorts of odd moments and stick around interminably, although it is doubtful indeed if any of the Parrilows would have put up with her for an instant—much less listened to her carry on.

"The Morning Star," in fact, has too much plot for its own good. Although it goes on exclusively in the Parrilow drawing-room, it gives the impression of being all over the place. This is too bad, for of all the blitz plays we have seen—including the celebrated blitz movie, "Mrs. Miniver"—this one is most authentic in characters and background.

# "The Morning Star"

**NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN**
***September 15, 1942***

## Emlyn Williams' Play About War-Torn London Stars Gladys Cooper

**By JOHN ANDERSON**

AFTER the lollipop and grease-paint binge of "Yesterday's Magic," Emlyn Williams has attempted to return in his newest play to the higher level of "The Corn Is Green," and "The Morning Star," presented at the Morosco by Guthrie McClintic, is a salute to the spirit of war-torn London, and its unflinching people. It is an iron spirit and I fear Mr. Williams has tried to strengthen it with a little theatrical hokum.

After an interesting first act, and in spite of some excellent scenes, it drifts off into the well-worn grooves of "The Wookey," "Heart of the City" and even "The Strings, My Lord, Are False," suggesting again that the blitz is too dramatic for our dramatists. "The Corn Is Green" is still a better answer to the Nazis than the direct challenge of "The Morning Star."

For Mr. Williams has tried to put into words the faith which inspires these people to look beyond the rubble and fire of a battered city and broken lives to the resolute purpose in their hearts. His title is symbol for a light that shines above the highest tracer bullets to show that there is a Creator, that this is part of His plan, and that our questions are impertinent. The only things that matter, says Mr. Williams, are the strength and the faith to fight on.

The trouble with the play, however, is that it has a tendency to reduce its inspiring messages to theatre terms that are not only banal but occasionally downright trashy.

### Touching Lines

Mr. Williams can be irresistibly touching in lines and situations, as when the comic charwoman says simply that she hated passers-by to see the wallpaper of her bedroom in a house that had been blown to bits. "It don't seem respectable."

Or when a woman can be heard above the blitz saying "This is the first time I've ever been under a piano." These seem spontaneous expressions of character, steadfast in the face of destruction, and worth a stageful of lofty, but dramatically empty, affirmation, set down with careful eloquence for deliberate effect.

In outline Mr. Williams has repeated the pattern of "The Corn Is Green." His young man is older and a doctor. Instead of the inspired school teacher his mentor is an ancient and cantankerous physician, and instead of the mining town wench, the seductress is an upper-bracket West End trollop trying to snatch the fine young doctor for a life of sin, if not Hollywood.

There is the lad's mother, and his wife, a character written with singular lack of sympathy, and there is a stuffed shirt medico who is no better than a carbon copy of one of Shaw's clumsiest caricatures.

All of them go through the blitz, carrying a plot neatly and rather too patly wrapped which has to do with the young doctor's experiments in death from heart shock during air raids. This story seems heavily contrived and its melodramatic effect is cheapened by such incidents as, I regret to say, a gramophone playing a symphony during the blitz.

### Offsetting Defects

Against these defects must be set the smaller and simpler details which seem truer to life than the theatre. The old doctor is admirably drawn, and superbly played by Cecil Humphreys. His companion and servant affords a fine opportunity for Rhys Williams' best performance.

Brenda Forbes provides a richly comic but deeply affecting portrait of the charwoman, and Gladys Cooper is excellent as the mother. In her first Broadway stage appearance Wendy Barrie provides perfectly the lustrous iniquity of the glamor girl beckoning the young doctor from his sober duties, and Gregory Peck, a newcomer, with only one previous Broadway appearance, does a superlative job with sensitiveness and fine restraint, as the young doctor who finally sees the light.

Mr. McClintic has directed this admirable cast with great care, and Stewart Chaney's setting, in peace and in bombed disarray, is notably good.

But Mr. Williams' characters and the things he was trying to say seemed more vital than the theatre stencil he put them in, so that the result is a weak play on a vigorous subject with enough high spots to measure a final disappointment.

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**NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE**
***September 15, 1942***

## Battle of Britain

**By HOWARD BARNES**

IN "The Morning Star" Emlyn Williams has attempted a stupendous dramatic task. The gifted English playwright has taken the Battle of Britain for his theme. Through the eyes and emotions of an upper middle-class family he has tried to re-create the terror, the agony and the quiet heroism of civilians in the crucial struggle of this war. Perhaps his own emotions were too deeply involved. For in spite of the brilliant production which Guthrie McClintic has accorded the play at the Morosco, it is curiously disappointing.

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It is doubly disappointing because the work comes so close to eloquent and authoritative statement on so many occasions. There are passages in "The Morning Star" which are tremendously moving in their tribute to the indomitable courage of the human spirit. Small scenes have illuminating insight into a cataclysm which is doubtless too close upon us to see in proper perspective. When he is a restrained craftsman the author has written gallantly and with profound meaning. When he is snatching for a plot, with a highly implausible triangle for its framework, he fails signally to compose the flaming accolade to his fellow men which he intended.

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The pity is that Mr. Williams did not scrap a great deal of the dramatic trappings which flap rather loosely about "The Morning Star." The characters are there, from the charwoman to the stalwart, white-faced lady of a fine house, who sees the whole security of her life crumbling about her. For the most part, they have been drawn with great sympathy and even a heroic pity. Left in the simple framework of resistance to death raining out of the skies, day after day and night after night, they could have been truly memorable.

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As it is, they have been involved in a series of stock situations which are badly out of keeping with the war background. One is treated to a windy exposition of the temptations to which a young doctor is exposed, until the death of his aviator brother brings the fool to his senses. One is forced to watch the studied simpering of an adventuress, before the trollop is tossed into the discard where she belongs. Moreover, there is a protracted medical experiment which just doesn't fall into the large pattern of the theme.

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Ingenious as the plot may have seemed, as plot, it is constantly made to look ridiculous in contrast to the scenes of artistry which Mr. Williams has wrought. You are not likely to give a hoot about a triangle when the charwoman peers out into the dawn after a night of hell and thinks she sees a tracer bullet, but then realizes that it is the morning star. In any case, this English play has had excellent mounting. McClintic has cast the show well and he has staged it effectively, even to realistic sounds of an air raid. "The Morning Star" will shake you and move you more than once, whether it leaves you satisfied or not.

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Gladys Cooper comes back to the theatre in the part of the grand London lady and she plays it with great power and emotional intensity. My favorite performance, though, is that of Brenda Forbes, as the unruffled housekeeper. Jill Esmond is fine as the wife who wins back her errant husband in the blitzkrieg and Cecil Humphreys and Rhys Williams are excellent as a veteran of the first war and his batman. Gregory Peck, as the doctor and Wendy Barrie, as the siren, left me cold, but their parts are not felicitous. "The Morning Star" is a brave try at a fine war play but it falls far short of its intent.

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**NEW YORK SUN**
***September 15, 1942***

## 'The Morning Star,' Emlyn Williams Drama, Is Offered at Morosco Theater

**By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE**

EMLYN WILLIAMS reports on the London blitz of 1940 in "The Morning Star," which was played with more expertness than was always quite justified last evening at the Morosco. He reports with emotional fervor and also with pathos and does not forget those bits of British understatement which can sometimes so comically make a serious point. Mr. Williams achieves almost everything, indeed, except a coherent play; he does all the little things well, and all the big things badly.

His story amounts to a succession of anecdotes about a young doctor with, as you may guess, a proud and sensitive spirit. This spirit of his leads him into difficulties. It draws him from the loving arms of his true wife into the mercenary embrace of a blonde cutie; it distracts him from the practice of medicine and, at one rather awful moment, leads him to write a novel called "Abysmal Torrent." (I hope for all our sakes, and for the sake of Mr. Williams, that I misheard that title.)

Dr. Parrilow's life is a series of crises, or theatrical situations. At the end of the first act he makes the great resolve not to go to Hollywood; at the end of the second he is allowed one of those author-given opportunities for an operation which will revolutionize medicine; at the end of the third he learns that he is about to become a father and is suitably stirred by the fact that life still goes on.

Except that the play seems to end act by act, there is nothing hopelessly undramatic about this story. The people, especially those put into the play because Mr. Williams likes to write about people and, as he proved in "The Corn Is Green," understands them, are convincing and perceptively observed. But the play as a whole is a straggler from the drama. Its "big moments" are, almost without exception, theatrical set pieces. One watches these approach unbelievingly, sure that a man of Mr. Williams's evident talent and long experience cannot really plan to employ so ancient a dodge. Mr. Williams does, though.

Against such awkward story-telling, fervor is powerless. The play is sometimes amusing, often rather touching. But it never, in spite of all the actors can do, achieves momentum. It is not very moving; in spite of raid sound effects it is not very exciting; it is not very anything, except well acted.

It is certainly that. It is a pleasure to watch Gladys Cooper fill in the outlines of the doctor's mother, making a character warmly human; it is a delight to watch Wendy Barrie turn the role of the blond gold digger into an individual accomplishment; you will admire the work of Cecil Humphreys as a gruff old physician and that of Brenda Forbes as one of those English chars who never, it seems, let an author down. Jill Esmond is admirable as the wife of the brave, restless spirit; Nicholas Joy is entertainingly fatuous as a spoke in the young physician's wheel and Rhys Williams provides that Welsh note without which a Williams play is impossible.

"The Morning Star" is dim in spite of them.

# "The Morning Star"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
*September 15, 1942*

## The Morning Star Makes Bow at the Morosco

By JOHN MASON BROWN

WITH admirable skill and a fine cast Guthrie McClintic presented last night Emlyn Williams' The Morning Star, a play about London during the darkest days of the blitz which is better by far than were such of its predecessors dealing with the same theme as The Wookey and Heart of a City.

This is not to say that Mr. Williams' play is a masterpiece or anything like it. But it is a drama, written with more sensitivity than skill, which holds the attention constantly and which manages in the midst of all its smiling gallantries to bruise the emotions.

Somehow it succeeds in ringing true even when it is false. Does it at times wallow in sentimentality? Is its tale of a distracted doctor's regeneration in war-torn London the kind of story that any pip-squeak professor of playwriting would in peacetime condemn as a camel's back burdened at moments with a sheaf of last straws?

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The critical answer has to be an emphatic "yes." But beyond the niceties of playwriting there is the war itself—as we all know or feel it must be. It provides Mr. Williams with an answer of his own. The war is not tidy. Or pretty. Or even in good taste. It never heard of Aristotle or of Baker. It turns what the rational recognize as hokum into a daily commonplace. It is only those untouched by it who can scoff at sentimentality (which in wartime is only sentiment with its defenses down) when death, destruction, separations, courage and hope are the staples of average living.

These staples, as they manifest themselves in a Chelsea home during the air raids of 1940, provide Mr. Williams with his subject. He writes of them as a man who not only knows life, and loves it, but who has actually been in London during its blackest hours.

Technically, his fault is trying to do too much. One wonders, for example, why he bothers so much about his doctor's contemplated sellout to Hollywood as the author of a successful novel? Or why the old codger who comes to live in the doctor's mother's house, which is the battered scene of The Morning Star, should be elaborately established as a peppery fellow and then turn out to be such a mixture of sugar and salt? Or why, when Mr. Williams is creating a strumpet (for a strumpet almost takes the doctor away from his long-suffering wife in The Morning Star), he should empty the paint box on her, even as he did when he drew the bad girl in The Corn is Green?

* * *

These objections come from the head, however. And Mr. Williams' target is the heart. If the heart rebels at moments, aware that Mr. Williams is hammering at it without respect for the Marquis of Queensberry's rules even for war plays, most usually it is forced to beat with Mr. Williams' dramaturgy, despite a protesting head. Mr. Williams can write his excellent scenes as well as his sloppy ones. He loves London with a contagious affection. He understands its people, their dauntless spirit and their gaiety. London somehow emerges as the real hero of this play.

What protects The Morning Star against its twinkly interludes or its moments of darkness is Mr. McClintic's direction. This and his cast. Mr. McClintic has seldom done a better, more quickening or sympathetic job. It is as excellent in its detail as it is in sweep. Mr. Chaney's setting is also highly contributive. So, throughout, is the company.

Some midnight word, however inadequate, must be said in praise of Gladys Cooper's fine, luminous acting of the harassed mother; of Brenda Forbes' humorously compassionate housekeeper; of Cecil Humphrey's admirable unction and dignity as the supposedly peppery old codger who is a paying guest; of Rhys Williams' poignant performance as his faithful batman; of Nicholas Joy's suavity as a foolish titled gentleman (when the script was with him); and of Wendy Barrie's glittering representation of the gaudy strumpet. Especial praise must go to Gregory Peck, a remarkable young actor . . . sensitive, intelligent, expert and an uncommon type . . . who by the playing of the war-shocked and regenerate doctor promises to go far.

In short, we have the Morning Star to thank for the new season's real beginning.

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NEW YORK TIMES
*September 15, 1942*

## THE PLAY IN REVIEW

### *"The Morning Star"*

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ON THE principle that an author ought to write about things he has experienced, Emlyn Williams has written about the 1940 bombing of London in "The Morning Star," which was acted at the Morosco last evening. Probably this is exactly what it was like to a middle-class family—messy, frightening, boring, nerve-wracking, all combined with a breaking down of old amenities. Since "The Morning Star" has been playing for ten months in London we may assume that Mr. Williams has caught the spirit of those terrible nights.

In order to present a background, however, Mr. Williams has had to invent a foreground of story and incident. Most of the story is episodic; a good part of it is hackneyed theatre. With the exception of "The Corn Is Green," Mr. Williams never seems to be able to get away from stereotyped ideas. An old hand at directing for character, Guthrie McClintic has presented an excellent cast of players who can act, and Gladys Cooper is giving the most skillful of her Broadway performances. But as a play "The Morning Star" looks as though it might have suffered from a little bombing itself. The bric-a-brac has been jarred. Some of the pieces have not been put back in their right places.

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When the play opens, Mrs. Parrilow and family, of Chelsea, are still hoping that London may be spared. So far there has been no general bombing of the city. Although Mrs. Parrilow is taking in a paying guest to keep the house running, she is still managing to live fairly well. By the time of the second act the night heavens have opened with fire and destruction, and Mrs. Parrilow and her household are living in one room in what would be squalor if they were not all people of breeding. Mr. Williams has admirably caught the group character of the Londoners that did not flinch in 1940 and lived on grimly to fight another day.

A lot of things happen in "The Morning Star." Mrs. Parrilow loses her younger son, who is an aviator. Her older son, who is a rising young doctor, has a protean career for three busy acts. He leaves his wife for a blonde hussy who seems almost to be public property. He writes a sensationally popular novel. He performs a heart operation that almost revolutionizes surgery. Finally he goes back to his wife, who obligingly promises him a baby in the climax of the play. None of his adventures seem much truer than pulp fiction. Mr. Williams is merely going through some theatrical motions.

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As the director, Mr. McClintic has not succeeded in weaving a silken purse out of the sow's ears and old hats contained in Mr. Williams's story. But he has treated the characters like living human beings. Miss Cooper acts the part of Mrs. Parrilow with neat and darting accuracy of perception. As her wayward son, Gregory Peck plays with considerable skill, also—avoiding in his acting the romantic tosh of the writing. In the part of the virtuoso blonde Wendy Barrie is handsomely and expensively impossible.

Cecil Humphreys is capital in the part of a curmudgeon with a heart of gold. Jill Esmond gives an attractively honest performance as a wife who is being unwillingly discarded. In "Yesterday's Magic" of last season, Brenda Forbes did her apprentice work as a household drudge in an Emlyn Williams's play; and as Mrs. Lane she is now doing her graduate work with distinction. In the part of the old doctor's personal servant, Rhys Williams adds another likable portrait to his lengthening gallery.

Mr. McClintic and his actors have seen more in the characters than Mr. Williams put there. They are constantly imparting the illusion of reality to a tangled and meretricious play.

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NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
*September 15, 1942*

## *Life in London During the Blitz*

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

GUTHRIE McCLINTIC has given a neat production to *The Morning Star*, which is perhaps a rather clever play, but without any question a bad one. It is bad because it is completely false, and doubly bad because it is false about an important and dignified subject—people's lives in London during the Blitz. Mr. Williams has written it with a decided air of seriousness, and yet has not hesitated to toss into it anything that will draw a laugh, that will create an effect, that will sound smart, that will pass for eloquent—anything, that is, that will make for "theatre."

There is no denying that he sometimes can get a laugh, or create some kind of stir on the stage, or contrive a superficially telling scene. And there is no reason to scorn a playwright for his sense of theatre. But there is a point, in such a play as this, at which a playwright with any self-respect must cease to exploit his material and begin to honor it; and Mr. Williams goes miles past that point without either qualms or questioning.

When he turns serious, it is only to become as stagey and sentimental as in his lighter moments he is smart and clever. He whips up a hodge-podge of emotions not because people under stress are such a hodge-podge themselves, but because each emotion will serve his purpose in turn, giving his story just the right mixture of grave and gay, of light and shade, of poignancy and picturesqueness.

He mixes his characters with the same slickness. The central figures of *The Morning Star* are well bred and upper middle class; but there is also a crusty and eccentric old doctor; a good-looking vulgar minx, who has the play's hero in thrall along with several politicians and dukes; and a Cockney charwoman who, with unpalatable condescension, is allowed to be comical and allowed to be pathetic, but under no conditions is allowed to exist as a human being.

Indeed, the greatest misfortune about *The Morning Star* seems to be its unwillingness to treat any of its people as human beings, its falling back upon the made-to-order gestures and attitudes and speeches that vulgarize the emotions they are supposed to enrich. Mr. Williams has tailored the Blitz to his own use; has sacrificed the real heroism of the English to his own brand of heroics. I don't mind his getting a laugh by having the charwoman—during the topsy-turvydom of the Blitz—keep her hat in the icebox or the lady of the house keep the pie in the desk; that is all to the good. But I do mind his going to the same catchpenny extremes with human beings and the war.

Mr. McClintic's direction is smooth, as is much of the acting. Gladys Cooper, as the central figure, is poised and well-bred; Cecil Humphreys, as the choleric doctor, is perhaps a little too much so. Wendy Barrie plays the minx up to the hilt, while Brenda Forbes and Rhys Williams are effective in character parts. There is a very nice performance by Jill Esmond, and an adequate one by Gregory Peck.